

MONTCLAIR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

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Superintendent of Schools

Community Message SY 21-22 No. 2

Jonathan Ponds, Ed.D.

September 17, 2021

Dear Families, Caregivers and Staff,

What a great feeling to see our students and staff back in the schools! We exhausted every avenue to make this possible despite Hurricane Ida's untimely arrival. I am filled with gratitude for our administrators, staff, Buildings and Grounds personnel, Township officials, and community members who worked with us, supported us and truly made this a reality.

We are working on a few pressing areas, and I am highlighting them below:

Use of Shields

After hearing your opinions on the use of shields and evaluating the research, the district will continue to use them as an additional mitigating strategy. We had a robust discussion about their use, and we agreed that because we are not able to maintain three feet of distance they would help. Shields also act as sneeze and droplet guards, and neighboring districts are using them as well. When vaccinations are available for all students, we plan on revisiting their use.

Transportation

In addition to a shortage of buses and drivers, which is a statewide and national problem right now due to the Pandemic and Ida, we are also experiencing route problems. We apologize for not communicating to you earlier and for the inconvenience this has caused. We understand your frustration, and we are taking the following short- and long-term steps to ameliorate the problems:

Short-term

1. Work with Essex Regional Educational Services Commission to determine bus capacities.
2. Contact additional vendors and seek other companies that can provide services.
3. Explore adjusting scheduled times to fit with bus availability. (This has occurred.)
4. Increase capacity to respond to all phone messages and emails.

5. Call (proactively) parents and caregivers of children who still need transportation.

Long-term

1. Implement a spring deadline for all transportation requests.
2. Require Special Education Supervisors to make requests to our Transportation Manager in the spring.
3. Implement earlier bidding of routes.

Outdoor Lunch

I understand that there are some concerns with respect to the outdoor eating areas. We are purchasing different types of tents that will be less burdensome and provide a more stable area. Every school has the appropriate number of tables. Presently, weather permitting, students are eating outdoors. Our Business and Buildings and Grounds Offices in collaboration with me are working to provide additional staff to support outdoor lunch.

Pooled Testing

We continue to work with Ginkgo Bioworks, an approved vendor by the New Jersey Department of Education, and used throughout the country. Representatives will be presenting at the Board of Education meeting September 20 at 7:30 PM. Pooled testing will be conducted weekly. Ginkgo Bioworks has a team that will be administering the nose swabs in the schools and will be able to provide us the results within 48 hours. Some of our ESSER funds and state screening aid will fund this initiative.

Navigating the School System

Do you have a question or concern that you are unsure about where to find the answer? A document on our website, which can be found under the Parents tab, [Navigating the School System](#), is a guide with key contacts that you may find helpful in figuring out where to bring your questions and concerns.

The district recognizes and celebrates National Hispanic Heritage Month which began this week and runs through Oct. 15. A feature article with pictures from around the schools will be forthcoming.

We also recognize Suicide Prevention and Awareness Month. Now more than ever, please always let us know if your children are experiencing any symptoms of distress. Our counselors are a key resource to lend assistance. Social emotional health is critical, and we offer our full support.

Looking forward to seeing you around the schools.

Sincerely,
Dr. Jonathan Ponds
Superintendent